This Little Piggy Went to the Hospital

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This Little Piggy Went to the Hospital

by ChainsawViolin

Summary

Jamie drags a reluctant Luke to the hospital following their little bedroom incident. Neither of them have a very good time.

Notes

So when I first posted the original fic, I was absolutely not expecting the sheer amount of feedback I got. It was legitimately really cool to see that people liked my interpretation of the two's dynamic

So of course it only took me over a year to follow up...

Well, I hadn't originally planned on doing a follow-up to begin with, but I think this is the most amount of 'can you do more' comments I've gotten on...basically anything. So I sorta feel like I have to do something, but the only thing that felt natural as a direct continuation was the hospital trip, and I'm not sure if people who came for the weird self loathing kinky sex also want to see me monologue about common sports injuries and fractures of the lower leg but who knows.

At this point I want to do another couple fics after this (with a bit more sex eventually) but I can't guarantee when those will come out. Then again idk if this is quite the direction people wanted anyway

Jamie had taken note of a few dark clouds on the horizon. He hadn't checked the weather recently, but it didn't take a genius to figure that an overcast that shade of grey probably meant rain wasn't too far off. Damn pain in the ass. He'd have to remember to bring his laundry back in, unless he wanted to re-wash it. And doing patrol in that kind of crappy weather was always a gamble. Umbrellas were bulky and awkward, but unless he wanted to dig out the waterproof eyeliner and get weighed down by rain-soaked clothes, he'd need one.

Oh well, that could be a problem further down the line. Had to worry about this one first.

A combo of the long ride, the car's vibrations, and the endorphins finally crashing had led to Luke dozing off against the door. Jamie didn't want to wake him up. He deliberately put it off as long as he physically could. No reason to bother, anyway. Jamie knew where they were headed, knew the pain-in-the-ass parking lot with its weird zigzag pattern that required looping around before you actually got to the damn parking spots. Kinda impressive all the back-and-forth jerking hadn't woken his passenger up already.

Well, something had to. Reluctantly, he prodded Luke on the shoulder until he started to react.

"Wh- 'zat you, Bosch? Forgot your stuff…?"

"Rise 'n shine, meathead, didn't want ya to fall out of the truck as soon as I opened the door. Feel better after your nap?"

Snark just felt natural. It made things feel a little more normal. He could practically see the layers of memory cross Luke's face as he tried to recall where he was and how he'd gotten there. Jamie chose not to prompt it. Instead, he kicked the driver's-side door out and eased a foot onto the asphalt.

He looped around the truck and popped the passenger's door open. "Don't try to get out, I'll help."

Luke held up an arm to push him back. "You don't gotta."

"Unless I want you to bust something else from falling over, then yeah, I 'gotta.'" Jamie replied, folding arms along his chest. "We'll go when you're ready, but you're not doing it yourself."

They'd already begun getting the hang of their three-legged walking. Luke's leg had started swelling properly by now, turning an ugly red in the process. Jamie only felt more vindicated in his decision. Though once more, he bit his tongue.

The sliding doors swooshed open as the two approached, blowing a wave of cool air onto the curbside. For as small as the force was, it was still enough to send Luke wobbling, and Jamie shoved his hand farther along the curve of his hip to get a better grip. He could only imagine what they must have looked like to an outsider, with their bodies tangled together, clothes

mussed and still sweaty. Jamie really wished he'd taken a fucking shower. At least nobody was at the counter already.

As they hobbled up, one of the counter windows slid open. "Afternoon, how may I help you?"

"Hey," Jamie half-waved, directing them to his station.

"Do you need immediate treatment? What's the injury?" He asked, looking between him and Luke.

"Screwed up my knee, something hit the back of it 'n it's all red and swollen now. Can't put weight on it."

"...Goodness, that does look awfully swollen." The receptionist murmured to himself, peering over the ledge to get a good look. "Okay, hon, I'll get you set up on the list. Just a moment, please…"

Luke swayed on his one leg, forcing Jamie to shift his weight and keep them both upright. They must have made for quite a sight. At least everyone else was too busy with their own issues to do much staring.

The receptionist tapped a pen against the countertop. "Alright then, sir, could I get your last name?"

"'Sullivan.' Two 'L's'."

"First name?"

"'Lukas.' With a 'K'."

Jamie did a double-take. "You name's *Lukas?"*

Luke offered a sheepish shrug. "I'unno, not like anyone calls me that, anyway. Jus' my legal name. Only time I get called that is when I go to the doctor's or have to sign paperwork. Or when my dad caught me throwing a basketball in the house…"

"On that note," the receptionist spoke up, "I'm trying to look up your information, but it appears your recent medical records haven't been updated in a while. Do you go to a private practice? Is there any contact information you can give us in order to obtain your recent records?"

"Uh…well…"

Jamie tried not to let his incredulity show. He failed. *"Seriously?"*

Luke turned even more flustered. "It- it's- I-"

"Riiight, lemme guess, you thought that since you're still built like a brick shithouse, everything's gotta be all fine and dandy, no reason for a doctor's appointment. You're so

predictable, man."

No response, presumably because he'd hit the nail on the head. Jamie folded his arms and looked off, leaving the other man to balance by himself. He wasn't going to help Luke along with this. Hopefully this'd give him a better idea of just how much he'd screwed up and to not try this shit like this again.

"Well, alright, please just take a seat for the time being. We'll use what records we have. Either way, you certainly want to have that injury looked at. Someone will be out to see you as soon as they're available."

Even if he was mad, he wasn't gonna make him walk. Luke leaned into him as they hopped over to the nearest pair of chairs. As soon as Jamie helped him sit, the other man stiffened and bit back a noise of pain.

"Shit- " He said, belatedly realizing the cause. "I hit you there, didn't I? Does sitting hurt too much?"

"M'fine, jus- just surprised me."

Jamie wasn't sure if he believed that, but he tried to help him shift into a slightly more comfortable position. Once he was sure Luke was secure and relatively stable, his glare immediately sharpened as he went back to chewing the idiot out. "I told you to be honest."

"I-I'm gonna! There's kids out here…" Luke put a hand on the side of his mouth, to hide it from sight. "They don't need to know what goes on in the bedroom," he whisper-hissed.

Okay, fine. He wasn't *completely* wrong there. Still, Jamie didn't want to give him too much room to wiggle out of this. His sense of concern and his aggravation just about canceled each other out, leaving the man sitting in uneasy silence. Just his luck, they'd left in a panic, which meant his phone was still on the kitchen table. Hopefully nothing important would come up until they got back. It was hard enough handling this, he didn't want anything else to deal with.

He occupied himself with the room's mundanities. Like all hospital waiting rooms, it was just cheery enough to not feel dismal, but still so muted and stale that it could never be anything else. Plastic plants hastily dusted clean, paintings of mountains and idyllic pastoral coastlines. A tiny fishtank bubbled away in the far corner of the room. As he squinted at it, Jamie realized there were no fish inside.

A man in scrubs emerged from one of the doors. "Looking for a 'Sullivan?'"

"Over here," Jamie raised a hand to get their attention. Even if he could walk just fine, he had no intention to haul Luke around more than what was completely necessary. The last vestiges of endorphins were finally sinking in for him as well, and it left a funny feeling in his limbs. Not quite pain, but close enough that he didn't want to push himself.

Thankfully, his call summoned the man to where they sat. "Ah, afternoon! We've got someone ready in the radiology wing for you." At his side, he pulled along some sort of

rolling mechanism. Jamie didn't realize it was a wheelchair until it unfolded. "Here. Pushing a chair should be a lot simpler of a way to help you get around for now. Would you like me to do it for you?"

"I- I guess…" Luke responded, after far too many seconds for Jamie's liking. If he had any reservations at following the guy's every goddamn move through this place, then they had just gone out the window.

"Well, okay, I'll take care of it. Let me know if it's a little too fast." The nurse only spoke again once he and Jamie managed to get Luke seated in the chair. He'd winced upon sitting down, but something about it was less like pain and more like something startled him. Once he seemed stable, the seat was rolled through the waiting room door and into the building proper.

Jamie strode alongside them, keeping pace without too much effort. He made a concerted effort to avoid looking Luke in the face. If it was too pitiable, it would only make his anger flare up again. Jamie had enough sense to know that it wouldn't be useful.

"Did you say something, mister Sullivan?"

"Whuh?" Luke looked up, but only sent a halfhearted glance in the nurse's direction. "Uh, no, nothing."

A peculiar metallic sound caught his attention. Jamie looked off in multiple directions to try and find the source. Nothing down the hall. Seemed to be following them. It must have been something in the chair's gears. As long as it didn't make the wheels snag, he wouldn't worry about it right now.

Even without the signs directing them, it was easy to tell when they were getting close to radiology. Warning signs and hazard symbols were plastered all over. Probably some legal necessity. Had to make it obvious to everyone that they were in a potentially dangerous area. Jamie was no science guy, but he knew what that shit could do to you.

"Alrighty-o, here we are!" The nurse spoke with a bit too much pep. "You two sit tight a moment, I'll let the tech know what you need."

"Thanks," Jamie gave them a nod of acknowledgement and not much more as he vanished into the room.

The door had been left ajar just enough that they could still hear the sound of confusion from inside. "Lola? I thought Aisha was supposed to be on shift."

"She's busy. I can handle it." A woman's voice responded.

"Uh, alright…" the nurse returned, an odd look on his face. "Sounds like she's ready for you! Do you need help getting inside?"

"No," said Luke.

Jamie glanced between the two. "Thanks, but I think we got it."

“Oh.” The man’s face froze. “I guess- I guess I’ll head out, then! You two take care and have a nice day!”

Rather than watch him leave, Jamie took over pushing the chair and tried to guide it into the room. He kept the door balanced on his hip and against his elbow. He didn’t think to look up until the two of them had already made it inside. Even though he’d been expecting a person on the opposite end of the door, something about the sight of her made him pause.

“I’m guessing you’re the one who needs the scan?”

Immediately, Jamie missed the awkward chipperness of the nurse. At least he had tried to come across as upbeat. The aura of unfriendliness practically radiated off of this woman, to the point where he was a little uneasy about looking at her head-on.

“We’re…uh…” He hesitated.

His reluctance only appeared to annoy her. The tech passed right over him, settling instead on Luke with as much friendliness she’d had for the nurse not a minute ago.

“Afternoon, Lukas. Ready for your X-rays?”

“Don’t…uh, I guess.” The man murmured back, hardly audible.

“Good. Don’t suppose you can get on the table by yourself?” She seemed to find the question funny, but neither of them shared her amusement. A gesture was sent in Jamie’s direction. “You take one side, I take the other?”

Luke made a little noise of protest, but gave up and let his shoulders sag. How odd it was, that she seemed to go out of her way to ignore one or the other of them. Maybe it was just a hospital thing. Jamie didn’t go to them often. Swallowing down his annoyance, he nodded and moved closer, to let Luke throw an arm around his neck.

As soon as he was seated on the table, Luke shied away from any nearby hands. Unfortunately, the tech either didn’t notice or intentionally ignored him once more, getting close enough that even Jamie, at a distance, took a reluctant step back.

“Alright, I’m going to have to ask you to remove any metal before we do the scan.” She gave him a momentary glance-over. “Earrings, other piercings, jewelry…mmm, the tags’ll definitely have to come off for this.”

Luke immediately recoiled, a hand covering the offending object. “No way.”

She huffed. “It’s for safety’s sake. If you cooperate, you’ll have them back in less than five minutes. Do you need a hand? If you have trouble, I can do it for you- “

Without offering him a moment to do the task himself, she had a hand on one of his dog tags. Luke reacted as well as one would expect. By some stroke of luck, it didn’t choke him where he sat.

“Easy, lady,” said Jamie, “he’s already rattled.”

“Don’t be stubborn,” the woman scoffed, never at any point thinking to let go of the tags. “It’ll just take a second.”

“Stop- ge- stop-!” Luke protested.

“It’s a safety hazard, just let me take them!”

The man was starting to hyperventilate against her grip. “Get off of me- !!”

Jamie jerked forward as the door behind him suddenly flung back, swinging to slam into the far wall.

“Lola! What the hell is the matter with you?!”

Into the room thundered a short, squat woman radiating an aura that Jamie had only ever seen before on world-class fighters and extremely pissed-off moms. Instinct found him a spot tucked into the corner far out of her range.

Finally, *finally* the tech thought to drop Luke’s tags as she turned to meet the new arrival. “The patient is being uncooperative! I can’t do the scan without removing any metal, and he refuses to take the necklace off!”

“It’s a *lower* extremity X-ray, did the leg not tip you off??”

“But- I thought- “

The woman slapped a hand over her own face. “Just- just get out of here, alright? I’m taking over before you give the man a damn panic attack.”

Apparently knowing better than to push her luck further, the other woman slunk out of the room without a word. As soon as she was gone, the atmosphere lightened noticeably. Jamie was still thoroughly uncomfortable, and, based on his expression, Luke wasn’t much better, but he’d calmed down just a hair without a stranger’s hands on him.

“I’m- really, incredibly sorry, sir. She’s a new hire.” The newcomer ran a harried hand through her hair. “I thought I could leave her alone for twenty minutes…” A sigh left her. “You okay, kiddo?”

“Fine,” replied Luke.

“Mmm.” Though she looked thoroughly unconvinced by his reply, she headed for the nearest wall to grab a lead apron from the hooks. “Let’s get your scans done. Can’t imagine you wanna be here much longer- “

Only when she turned did she notice there was another person in the room. “Man, you’re real quiet, huh? You supposed to be in here?”

“Jamie.” Luke halfheartedly nodded in his direction. “He’s my…uh…”

“Friend.” Jamie finished.

“Chaperone,” said Luke.

“Gotcha, gotcha.” She looked between the two with an odd expression. “Sorry for the trouble, Jamie. You okay waiting outside for a couple minutes?”

“‘Outside?’” He repeated.

“I’m *really* not supposed to have anyone aside from the patient in the room. And I do promise this *is* actually a safety measure, it’s important to limit the radiation exposure as much as possible for everyone. I’ll do this as quickly as I can, though. Does that sound good?”

‘Good’ was a stretch, but Jamie would take it. He didn’t trust himself with more than a nod of acknowledgement before shoving his hands in his pockets and heading for the door. A vague memory of chairs by the door that he’d passed by on the way in found him a place to sit for the time being. They were as stiff as the ones in the lobby.

He let out a breath he hadn’t realized he was holding. One hand found the other in his lap, but all he could think to do was twiddle his thumbs as he waited.

“You comfy up there? Comfy as you can get?” The woman’s voice seeped through the plaster.

Luke must have replied, but he couldn’t make it out.

“Good to hear. Alright, hon, just gotta move this a little- “

Though the walls muffled it, Jamie still jerked at the sound of an honest-to-god yelp. Not a scream, not a shout, but a high, shrill, startled noise that jabbed his eardrums like a sharpened stick.

(It dug up an old memory, recalled only in shards.

His childhood pet rat (only a few months before it escaped its cage and was never found again, if he remembered right).

His father reluctantly at his side, pulled from work to shuttle him and the little rodent to a routine veterinary exam.

Little Jamie bouncing in his seat, probably giving the poor animal an aneurysm in the process.

A little girl sitting across the way. She was staring at the floor, clinging onto a faded green leash. On the other end, the oldest, scruffiest-looking dog he’d ever seen, barely able to keep its head up.

The vet called the girl before they called for him. He’d sulked in his seat, watching the girl and her parents coax the old mutt to stand, watched it limp into the exam room. He didn’t understand why they got to go first. He didn’t care.

He went back to swinging his legs. Poking his fingers through the cage. Counting the ceiling tiles. Forgot about the girl. Forgot about her dog.

Something gave a sharp, high-pitched yelp.

He remembered the dog.

“It’s just getting its shots, Jamie.” His father had sighed, writing something down on his PDA. “It’s fine. Shots only sting for a minute.”

The girl and her family came out of the exam room. The girl still held onto the faded green leash.

There was no dog on the other end anymore.)

It took Jamie several moments to realize that he was gripping his pants leg so hard the blood was leaving his knuckles. He forced it to loosen. He told himself that it was to avoid straining the material. His clothes were expensive. When the doorknob rattled again, Jamie damn near jumped out of his seat, only keeping himself from doing so at the last second. Play it cool, Siu. Play it cool.

“Sorry for the delay.” The technician gave the man a nod upon finding him. “We should have all the scans we need. I’m gonna send this over to radiology so they can be printed out, but for now, you two can head over and wait.”

Jamie tried to dredge up his usual sense of offbeat cool, but it didn’t come as easily as it tended to. “Great. How’s the meathead?”

“How’s…oh.” Her eyes flicked in the direction of the door. “He…didn’t look like he wanted me touching him anymore. Would you be willing to help him down?”

Something told Jamie that saying ‘no’ wasn’t an option without it ending badly in some way or another. Fine, he could take one for the team.

Scooting past the woman, Jamie let himself in. Luke was still on the table, just as she’d said, and not really looking at anything. “Feelin’ alright, big guy?”

The way that his mouth twitched made it look like he was trying for a smile, but it didn’t take form. “‘m fine.”

That was bullshit, but Jamie kept his mouth shut. After a good minute or so of awkward shuffling, they managed to get Luke seated back into the chair. The tech still stood waiting outside for them once they succeeded in maneuvering through the doorframe.

“Everyone holding up okay?”

“Fine enough.” Said Jamie. “Where are we headed?”

“Room 236. It’s just down the hall, but do you want someone to escort you?”

“We’ll be alright.” Probably better to give Luke some space. It was weird to see the guy acting like an introvert. For all the time he’d known him, he’d thrived off of meeting new people, he treated it like a sport.

“Mmkay. You two take care, okay?”

“Yeah. Thanks.”

Once they were alone- alone as you could get in a hospital, at least- Jamie craned his neck over the chair. “You okay, dude?”

“Huh?”

“‘You okay,’ I said.”

“What are you talking about?”

Luke couldn’t be so dense that he hadn’t realized his own behavior. Jamie was desperately holding back the urge to call bullshit. With how things were going, it would probably just make him clam up even more.

Jamie made a noncommittal, and hopefully nonjudgemental, little noise. “Jus’ not used to seein’ you like this. ‘s it hurt real bad?”

Luke shuddered like he’d just swallowed something rancid. “Don’t like hospitals. Really don’t like doctors. Reminds me of…”

He went silent again. Jamie chose not to press the issue further. Just kept pushing.

…The metal sound was back. Jamie tried to crane his neck as he walked, hoping whatever snag in the gears would make itself obvious if he just looked long enough.

“Hey. Meathead.” He said. “You hear that? I’m not imagining stuff, right? I think something might be…”

As he trailed off, he noted another sound. Near-inaudible, low, but present. His rival’s voice, barely above a whisper.

Jamie leaned over the seat’s back, dipping as close as he could get without alerting Luke that he was trying to listen in.

“1-9-0-1-” He murmured, almost mechanically “1-2-2-3-4”

Maybe it didn’t matter if he was subtle or not. When he caught a glimpse of the man’s face, his eyes were muddled, distant. The jingling sound came from Luke’s tags. He worried the thin pieces between his fingers like he was trying to start a fire. Every time the chain went slack then tight, or the pieces slid apart too far, it made a little clink of metal-on-metal.

“1-9-0-1-1…”

Annoying as the sound was, Jamie kept his mouth shut. No point in starting an argument, especially not over something so trite. If the technician was right, they had to be nearly there already, anyway.

“236, 236…” He squinted at the placards. “Yeah, that’s the one.”

It wasn’t the most generous fit with the wheelchair, but Jamie managed to make it fit in a couple tries. Nor was the room itself particularly large. Even if it was awkward and miserable, at least it was awkward and miserable by themselves. Better with each other than with strangers. The devil you know, and all that.

They sat in silence for several minutes, only looking at one another in sparse glimpses, like part of them thought the other would just evaporate into thin air unless checked on. The thought of conversation crossed Jamie’s thoughts many times. He just…didn’t know what to talk about. He wasn’t sure if there was any way to just have a casual conversation amid all of this. They were in the goddamn hospital. What’s more, they were in the hospital because one of them had beaten the other with a cane in the middle of shitty homebrew BDSM that neither of them had any real idea of how to do right. It sounded like the start of a stand-up routine. It should have been so absurd that it was funny. Jamie wished it was.

Hospitals had vending machines, didn’t they? A headache was starting to bloom behind his eyes, and that usually meant he’d been sweating too much. He could probably ask somebody. Maybe some drinks would lighten the mood.

When the door finally did open, both jumped in shock. If the man noticed, he chose not to comment on it. “Good afternoon, I’m Dr. Minaki. You two were the ones that just had x-rays done with Aisha, yes?”

Jamie nodded. “Hey, doc. Thanks for coming down so quick.”

“Of course. It’s best to be efficient. A pleasure to meet you, Mister…?”

“Siu.”

“Ah.” He said nothing more to clarify. “And hello to you as well, Mister Sullivan.”

“Luke,” he replied, strangely curt and lacking his usual offbeat nature. “Uh, j- just call me Luke. Please.”

“Alright then, Luke. I had a chance to take a look at your scans.” Seemingly unbothered by the response, the doctor clipped the x-rays to a light board on the wall. “What exactly happened when you received this injury?”

Luke immediately floundered. “Well, uh- I fell down-“

“Caning.” Jamie answered for him, stunningly frank. “Bamboo rod, I accidentally hit him in the wrong spot. Dunno the circumference, but I can check if it’d help.”

The man blinked. “I see.” He replied. “Not to worry, I’ve seen plenty of patients with issues of that kind. And, at least, you were smart enough to come immediately.”

Jamie tried to send a smug look over his shoulder, but it came out much less potent than he'd planned it to. Luke wasn't even looking in his direction. His attention was distinctly elsewhere, though seemingly not focused on whatever it was he was looking at.

"If you two would like to take a look here," the doctor pointed to one of the scans, ghostly-blue through the film. "So the main area of concern is, of course, the joint area." He traced a pale lump on the x-ray with a capped pen. "There's very little padding to soften that sort of blow, compared to, say, a thigh. Because of that, joint injuries can involve damage to the connections between your bones. There are a few ligaments in this area that connect the upper and lower legs.

In this particular instance, the ones of note to focus on are the Anterior Cruciate Ligament, or ACL," he tapped at a spot on the scan, then slid it a bit to the side "and the Posterior Cruciate Ligament, or PCL. These two, as a pair, are responsible for connecting the tibia and the femur, while also ensuring that the bones remain in place. But, of course, these ligaments can experience tearing. It's most commonly a sports injury, though in your instance, it has the possibility of coming from any blow to the leg."

Neither of the men were medical professionals, but the way Luke nodded along seemed to indicate he understood some level of it. Jamie mentally kicked himself for not doing more anatomy research during his online studies. Wasn't being careful supposed to be his responsibility? Especially when he knew Luke had absolutely no interest in it…

"If you'd look right over here, you can see some tearing in your posterior ligament." The pen tip gestured around a ragged edge on the scan. "As far as I can tell, there was no damage to the ACL nearby. At least, nothing significant enough to appear on any of the scans we took. There may be some inflammation, but that's far more manageable than a tear. Those aren't unheard of, but it is significantly rarer. I assume because it was such a localized blow, the damage was isolated to a small space. The majority of the damage appears to be centered around the posterior ligament. And, because it's torn, not fully detached, hopefully that means it will be able to heal itself and reform that connection without needing some kind of stitching.

Likewise, the x-ray found a small fracture in the upper end of the fibula. But, thankfully, a fibula fracture is usually only considered a serious concern if the fracture is lower, closer to the ankle joint. The tibia is more responsible for bearing the body's weight, so of the two bones to break, you broke the one that's less load-bearing, *and* in a spot that poses less risk of severe long-term complications. Very fortunate of you- though certainly don't think I'm trying to encourage another accident like this. I'm simply saying that you were very lucky in this particular instance to not be injured as severely."

Jamie nodded along, half-understanding the technical jargon. It certainly sounded optimistic to him. "So whattaya do for that sorta thing?"

"Though I don't want to guarantee anything yet, the odds are good that this won't require surgical intervention. Even on the rare chance that it may, your prognosis is very good. If you follow all your care instructions seriously, there should be minimal lasting effects, if at all. Simply give your injury the time and space to mend itself on its own terms. We'll keep an eye on things and try to intervene if something looks like it isn't healing the way we want it to.

For now, we'll keep a brace on it to ensure the fracture doesn't slide. We don't want it to heal out of alignment."

"Of course, of course. Makes enough sense."

"Ah, so you have a general idea of how we're going to address this? Excellent. Still, let me know if anything needs clarifying, I want to make sure we all understand."

"Right." Jamie nodded again. He hoped his attentiveness was making up for Luke's lack of it.

"But as I said, right now it doesn't look like this will require any inpatient care. I'm sure we can trust you to manage things by yourself. Juuuuust as long as you don't go and get into any fights, haha."

Despite his muted enthusiasm, Luke managed a chuckle at that. "Well, that's gonna be a problem, that's literally my *job."*

"Pardon?"

"Practice fights," Jamie clarified. "Works at a training gym."

"...I see." His lips pursed. "That is going to raise some issues with your work, then. Regardless of if there's necessary surgical intervention or not, it's best to avoid any strenuous activity that may cause further damage. You should be able to walk safely with a crutch after a day or two, but under no circumstances should you engage in any form of strenuous exercise or combat, even in a practice setting. The best thing you can do for yourself is to rest and take it easy. Is there any chance there are other instructors that could take over for you? Do you have a substitute trainer?"

Luke was silent for quite a while. "I'unno," he eventually replied.

"You don't know?"

"'s not a big gym. I do a lot of the stuff myself. I can…probably call the higher-ups-"

"I'll take care of it," said Jamie.

"You're kiddin' me," said Luke, looking at his rival in disbelief.

"Yeah, why not? I got skills. I've trained a few of the kids around Chinatown before. I'm a natural!"

"But I- you-"

"I'm sure Buckler won't mind as long as you're still there. You can just, y'know, direct and stuff. Just don't do the actual fighting."

Dark eyes met blue in a sustained stare. Jamie didn't need to say it. The look in Luke's eyes told him he already understood.

'And I can watch you to make sure you won't do anything stupid'

"Well, that sounds fine with me," Dr. Minaki nodded. "I can send in a prescription for some higher-dosage painkillers if you'd like, but if you two don't have any more questions right now, we can work on having you discharged so you can head home and get some much-needed rest."

That seemed to reassure Jamie much more than it did Luke. Though once the doctor had a brace fitted onto his leg, the man's stiff shoulders visibly eased. Even if he hadn't said anything, it didn't surprise Jamie to know that he had been in pain.

…The thought should have relieved him, and yet the way it crossed his mind made some nameless part of him wince.

Waiting in the hall for them was the same overly-friendly nurse they'd encountered before. "Heya, you two! Dr. Minaki said you'd be ready real soon, is there anything you need to get from the desk?"

The thought of a drink was still tempting, but it seemed better to just get the two of them home. "No. Don't suppose you could point us toward the door, could ya?"

"Of course! I'd be happy- "

It wasn't until Luke made a noise of discomfort that Jamie realized what had just happened. The nurse had reached out to grab one of the wheelchair handles and take over the act of pushing. As soon as he'd felt a hand near his, Jamie had jerked everything back protectively, even Luke himself.

Jamie and the nurse stared at each other in odd silence. "Is…everything okay, sir?"

"Yeah, fine, uh- " Jamie loathed how little composure he seemed to have today, he had to look like an idiot. "I'll push. Just tell me where I'm going."

"O…kay…?"

Confused or not, the man did as asked. He led the two rivals back out of the tangled innards of the hospital and out the same door they'd come in. "Be careful! You're almost at the curb, don't want to roll off."

The wheelchair jerked to a stop. Luke grabbed one of the armrests to keep from sliding. Jamie blinked back to awareness. Where had he parked? It couldn't have been that long ago, but the memory was hazy. He didn't want to admit he'd damn near walked off the sidewalk without thinking. It would have been humiliating enough to trip, but he likely would have dumped Luke face-first onto the concrete in the process. As much as the guy pissed him off, he really didn't want to cause any more accidents today.

When a stranger's hand reached for the push-bar again, Jamie reluctantly let it replace his. "I'll just be back in a sec."

Jamie didn't know why he felt the need to declare it. Nor did he know why Luke looked so uneasy at having his rival leave his side. In any other instance, he would have been happy to have Jamie out of his face.

Upon finding his car and pulling up to the curb, the nurse pulled the door open and helped Luke clamber inside. "You in there okay?"

Luke said nothing, merely belting himself in silently.

"Well, um," the man hesitated, returning to his usual smile. "Have a nice day, mister Sullivan! Take good care of that leg!"

He wished he'd thought of another response than 'thanks, you too' but by the time Jamie realized he'd said it, they were already driving away. Whatever, not the most embarrassing thing that had happened today.

Watching the hospital vanish in his rearview almost made him feel better. Almost. He'd started holding his breath again. It escaped in little jerky exhales, trying to keep quiet enough that Luke wouldn't notice. It wasn't helping his headache. Maybe he should have gotten that drink after all.

"Feelin' okay, man?"

Luke shrugged. "Hurts less."

"Less is good." Jamie expected he would've been chewed out more for the whole 'inviting myself to your job' thing, but perhaps he should have seen that as a blessing instead of a disappointment…even though he didn't know where Buckler actually was. He'd look it up. Or Luke could tell him in the morning. He'd figure something out.

Catching sight of a particular road sign, Jamie flicked the blinker and eased into the far lane. "Hold on, gotta take a stop real quick."

"Why are you pulling over?" A ghost of amusement nearly touched Luke's voice. "Didn't already forget where I live, didja?"

"Just stopping at the drugstore. Figured if you're gonna be stuck with the brace, you'll need crutches."

"I *don't* need crutches," he huffed "the- the brace is fine. He said it didn't have any weight put on it."

"You shouldn't be walking on it either way, better off keeping the weight off it as much as possible."

His rival sighed in annoyance. "It's not a big- "

"We're getting you crutches." Jamie snapped.

Luke withered, slumping back against his seat. "...Yes, sir."

In any other situation, Jamie would accuse him of deliberately playing with his emotions by talking that way. When he looked him in the face, though, he could see Luke was already staring off into the distance, responding automatically instead of intentionally.

Less than three minutes passed between Jamie leaving the car and coming back. He'd grabbed the first pair of adjustable crutches the store had, hauled them up to checkout, and left. There was probably a pile of change left behind that he hadn't even thought to take from the poor cashier. No point in going back now, though, the damage was already done-

Something about the thought made him flinch. Before either of them could question it, the car peeled out of the lot and back onto the main drag. Luke turned away, staring out the side window and watching the buildings pass by in a smear of color.

It had been ages since Jamie had stopped by Luke's place, but he remembered it all the same. What had it been, lost keys? Lost wallet? Something lost, something he'd had to return that he knew the guy would need sooner rather than later. If they didn't meet in the streets, then they met at Jamie's place. Even if he knew where it was, Jamie hardly got to see the inside. The outside hadn't changed, at least. He caught Luke giving the place a look with something like fondness. It made him feel even more like an asshole when he had to help his rival get standing again.

Luke was clumsy and uncoordinated on the crutches, even after several attempts at adjustment, but he shied away whenever Jamie tried to reach out and help him steer. The sudden coldness puzzled him. It might have been a relief, seeing Luke act a bit more 'normal,' but with how weird he had been all afternoon, it was hard to not see it as worrisome.

He held his tongue until they made it to Luke's apartment. No point in startling him and making the poor bastard fall down a flight of-

Jamie flinched again. The headache was reasserting itself. As Luke unlocked his front door, Jamie caught a glimpse of it from the outside. He didn't like what he saw. The place was a goddamn mess, how the hell did he even get around in there normally?

"You sure you don't want me to stay over?"

"No." Luke replied, shifting one crutch under his arm.

"You're not sure?" Asked Jamie, half-joking, quietly hoping it'd get Luke to act more like himself.

No such luck. His distant gaze hardened. "I'll be *fine.*" He grumbled.

Jamie raised his hands. "Fine, okay. Just call me if you need anything, okay? Or call Kim, if I don't pick up."

"Sure."

"Great. I'll be back first thing to pick you up for work. Eight-fifteen sound alright?"

"...Sure."

As soon as the door slammed shut, Jamie's smile dropped. He stuffed his hands into his jacket and slunk back to the truck.

He felt…weird. And, truth be told, he's felt weird ever since they left the hospital. The aches were one thing, but somewhere along the line it shifted into a strange feeling nestled in his guts. Jamie has no clue why. He's not the one with a busted leg.

*'The busted leg that **you're** responsible for, don't forget.'* His mind unhelpfully supplied.

He caught sight of himself in the rearview mirror. It didn't surprise him that he looked so unkempt, but he still hated what looked back at him. A hand covered his face to block out the light and wipe the sweat from his brow. Something in the back of his mind feels like it's slipping and sliding out of place. It's a little like when he gets drunk enough, but still not quite it- and he hasn't had a drop to drink today, even though right now, he really wishes he had.

Home wasn't too far, even with evening traffic, and thank fuck for that. Jamie realized partway there that his hands were shaking. He wanted to chalk it up to the dehydration he'd never had the chance to deal with. He knew it was a lie.

Over the rumble of the engine, his thoughts whispered to him.

'You're awful. You're disgusting. How can anyone do that to somebody?'

He tried to shake it off. It was far from the first time he'd caused an injury. Hell, he made a living out of fighting, it was nothing new to him.

'That's different, and you know it. At least with them, you don't pretend it's some kind of 'love,' do you? And at least they fight back'

"He talked me-" Jamie didn't know why he was speaking aloud, but he couldn't stop himself. "I didn't want to, it was his idea- "

'But you still went along with it. That means you liked it. You had fun doing it. What was stopping you from saying no?'

By some stroke of luck, he'd driven home mostly on autopilot. His grandmother had chastised him enough about paying attention to his surroundings and being safe, he didn't want to invoke her lecturing in his thoughts, too.

Though to make up for it, the ones currently hounding him continued their wheedling as he tried to park. *'You barely tried to talk him out of it. You wanted to beat the shit out of him, this was the perfect excuse, you goddamn scumbag. A fair fight isn't good enough for you, is it?'*

"He asked for it."

'Such a good excuse, isn't it? 'He asked for it,' 'he asked for it.' Do you know what they call people who say stuff like that? There's a name for that, you know. Are you saying that's what

you are, Siu?'

Glaring at his reflection, he ripped the key from the ignition and kicked the door open. He had to remind himself not to be so rough. Less out of a concern for himself, and more that he didn't want to pay for car repairs, especially on a car that wasn't even his.

Being home should have helped him relax. It didn't. The closest he could get was a sense of relief in realizing he'd remembered to lock the door behind him after all. The way it slammed behind him just made his headache intensify.

Phone still on the table. Good, at least he knew where that was. He picked it up and checked for new notifications he might've missed. Nothing important. With his free hand, he felt for the fridge door and pulled out a can of tea. Half of it went down within a few sharp swallows. It didn't help him relax, either. He tried to sip it slower, hoping it'd finally have some effect.

With both hands occupied, Jamie drifted into the living room. In his distraction, he nearly tripped on something that came underfoot, only catching himself at the last moment. Biting down a curse, he tucked his phone away to get a better look at the offending obstacle.

The cane was still left on the floor.

…Shower. He needed a shower. Something nice and hot to clear off the sweat and distract him from today.

He was already practically naked by the time he made it to the bathroom. The feeling of his clothes had become overwhelming. Cleaning the mess could come later, he'd tidy up the trail of discarded clothes through his apartment once he didn't feel like his own skin was too constricting.

Hot water cascaded down his back. He yanked his hair out of its braid and ran a hand through it, trying to jar loose dandruff and whatever might've managed to get stuck in it. He didn't want to think about it. Jamie reached for the pumice to scrub off the dead skin on his arms and heels. It helped him feel cleaner, like shedding something filthy and unnecessary. He needed to be clean. Needed to make the feeling go away. Everything would be better when the feeling went away.

In his singleminded determination to get clean, he failed to notice the water gradually pinkening, then reddening, as it swirled the bathtub drain.

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